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THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs on  
LD 581, An Act to Fund the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship  
Program  
March 31, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford; and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. It is my pleasure to present LD 581, "An Act to Fund the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program."

The Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship program was created by the Legislature in 2009 as a means to encourage Maine-based students to attend medical school in Maine. The goal was two-fold: build aspirations for Maine students to attend medical school and encourage them to attend a Maine-based medical school with the goal of expanding the number of physicians working in Maine.

I am proud to offer this bill, which would build into the state's budget ongoing funds to support 3 additional state-funded scholarships annually, on top of the 2 ongoing, that are required to be matched by the private scholarships offered by the school. It's a true public/private partnership approach.

**A Brief History**

The Doctors for Maine's Future scholarships were originally funded by repurposing funds administered by FAME that "saved" spots in medical schools for Maine students, and federal stimulus funds. The repurposed FAME funds support a total of four scholarships per year – two per school. The program's goal is to support 4 students per year. As it currently stands, the program must seek additional state funds every two years to support the full program.

Very importantly, the schools are required to match the state scholarships with privately-funded scholarships, ensuring that at least 8 Maine-based students receive scholarships annually. In fact, Maine Medical Center's program commits to funding 20 scholarships for Maine-based students annually, and UNE has successfully matched its Doctors for Maine's Future scholarships annually as well.

This is a very successful public/private partnership that exemplifies a successful collaboration between the state and private business.

As a resident of Oxford County, I am grateful for the care provided by the team at Stephens Hospital in Norway. It's even more inspiring to know that part of that team – Dr. David

Lapham and Dr. Adriana Nadeau – were graduates of the Tufts University/Maine Medical Center Maine Track program. And Dr. Makenzie Zidek is a pediatrician who graduated from UNE's medical school. It is particularly noteworthy that Dr. Nadeau was a Doctors for Maine's Future Scholar!

Stephens is part of a unique program offered by Maine Track in which medical school students spend a year working at a rural hospital. The goal is to inspire students to work in rural medicine – and to train them on how to do so effectively. And it's working! 35 MaineTrack students have trained at Stephens since the program's inception. Of those, 6 are practicing in Maine, 11 are still in training and one wants to return after completing military service. As you will hear from the students themselves, these scholarships are instrumental in helping students stay in Maine.

As you have undoubtedly heard, rural Maine hospitals are facing a myriad of challenges, and our physician shortage is a big one. We are projected to need a net increase of 120 primary care physicians by 2030 just to meet the demands of our aging population. And that doesn't account for retirements or physicians leaving the state. A strong rural economy relies upon access to excellent health care. Providing additional funds for the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarships is an important step for the State to take in building a strong physician workforce for our future.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer questions.